



3/2000

Commissioner.

Enclosed please find articles about how I feel as a citizen of this community regarding the sale of Exxon to Valero Energy Corp.

I realize upfront that my viewpoint probably is a minority one? Of course this is subject to debate since we as a town have never had the opportunity to vote on whether or not we wanted a monster oil refinery in the middle of ^{our} city.

I would hope that you would take a long hard look at the on going "suit" by the Attorney General of California and the District Attorney of Solano County against Exxon. This was filed in Sept. of 1999 and as far as I can tell has not yet been litigated. This story was reported on "once" in the local paper and when I call for updates with Solano County district attorney all I receive is silence! They don't

(2) allow any information to the public, not even up-coming court dates? This just doesn't sound or feel very democratic —

The theme of my article is that without true grassroots democratic representation — we are presently being "occupied" by a giant Corporation without recourse. In other words, "money talks — so democracy walks."

Sir, as an objective overseer I would ask, that you meet with the folks of this city to find out "how we feel," about this situation, personally I think this is your duty as a public servant to find out what the pulse of this community really is — with regards to the problem of our town being polluted on a daily basis ...

Will Bryson —

(PS) I hope to hear from you — Mr. Pitofsky ...

"I'll take two of the Thin Mints."

I guess that's what they call teacher diplomacy or give me a call at 1-926-682-6440.

Opportunity is now to ask if refinery is really needed

By Will Gregory

Is it not time we end the 30-year occupation of the oil refinery business here in Benicia? The question that is not being asked, is why do we need an oil refinery here in Benicia?

This is a historic town with a wonderful history. We are a Main Street-certified city. We have spectacular views of the rolling hills and the beautiful Carquinez Strait. We have a thriving school system and a very competitive system of team sports for our children. However, right in center of our community we have monster oil refinery spewing poison chemical particulates and causing vast environmental harm. Does anybody see the irony of all this? It seems quite clear.

Wouldn't it be gratifying to be like other Bay Area cities of Napa, Petaluma or Lafayette and be free of the awful foul air coming from Exxon. According to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Environmental Defense Fund, statistical data reveal Exxon poisoning the air with more toxic emissions than any other refinery in California.

It would be much better if we didn't have to worry about a possible explosion or release of some black cloud threatening our community. We have been fortunate so far. I don't know if there has ever been a reported accident or explosion at Exxon, but why must "our" community continue to take this enormous risk? Unfortunately, we have all read about the Tosco refinery both at Avon in Martinez and now in Rodeo. (The previous tenant, Unocal was/is one of the worst polluters in the world.) It really is

GUEST COLUMN

only a matter of time.

Recently we have learned that Attorney General of California Bill Lockyer and Solano County District Attorney David Paulson are ~~spewing~~ Exxon Benicia for leaking and spilling (from numerous sources — storage tanks, processing units and pipelines) petroleum and other chemicals. The petroleum spilled has contaminated soil, groundwater and surface water, including water that is a potential source of drinking water. According to the suit filed in September 1999 — case 013407 — Exxon has been polluting the groundwater since 1988! Exxon, in a 27-page rebuttal, has denied all charges. Citizens of our town and county can read the summation at the court house, civil division, second floor, in Fairfield.

Exxon's record here has never been scrutinized. For example, has there ever been an environmental impact report done? Despite all the happy talk from our council members and chamber of commerce types about Exxon being a good neighbor, the oil refinery is a very dirty trade. Our wonderful waterway and the San Francisco Bay are just an illusion of environmental beauty — just below the surface of these areas is vast chemical contamination that is constantly playing havoc with our fisheries. A short list of known cancer-causing elements include benzene, mercury, selenium, and dioxin. It's well-documented that the aforementioned refineries have been spewing these materials for many years!

It would be much more socially conscious, not

to mention socially responsible if the residents of Benicia "voted" on this proposal to bring in another oil firm in to our town. To leave this decision to our council members and the mayor is very worrisome, especially when the turnout for the last election was less than 30 percent. The whole deal comes down to revenue stream; follow the money, as they used to say. So, again the question that is not being posed is do we want a city with an oil refinery and all the pollution of our environment and the corrupting influence that this "dirty money" has on our local government? Or, do we want to truly free ourselves and become the first city in the Bay Area to show strength of community and eliminate this toxic multinational industry that is slowly but surely poisoning our right to clean air, water and soil.

We need to do what is right, not convenient. The weight of evidence now available to the general community is irrefutable. More recently, we can see how the parent Exxon is treating its workers here. This is just more evidence of the cold-hearted tactics of a giant corporation on a local community.

We need to rethink our institutions in every aspect. Our representatives here in Benicia and our business leaders (Benicia Chamber of Commerce, Benicia Industries) need to break out of the tyranny of their assumptions and conventional wisdom that the way things are is the only way that they can be. We find ourselves with an opportunity to make a major change for the good and good sense dictates that we act to end the occupation of our town.

Will Gregory is a resident of Benicia.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Benicia

School districts

Solano Times

Quid pro quo?

Editor:

Re: The article of Jan. 20 in the *Herald*, titled "Exxon signs agreement to protect city revenues." I found this to be a very provocative statement. Why would the world's largest oil company and second largest corporation in the world agree to protect our little city's revenue stream? What does this mean? Is this a quid pro quo? If so, what are we giving up? And of course, the citizens of this town should also be wondering who is going to protect "us" from Exxon.

In this same article council member Corbaley states, that, environmental impact reports and clean-up schedules are proceeding along on numerous contaminated sites: Rose Drive; Tourtelot property and the Old Benicia Arsenal

She doesn't mention Lake Herman, which is mercury poisoned, nor does she even hint that the oil refinery itself is a harmful site. We know from evidence released from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Environmental Defense Fund that the refinery has high toxic air emissions in California... has, council member Corbaley requested an Environmental Impact Report on this locale? If not, why not? Remember this refinery is a buffer zone — open space, away from a school and residences... by the way open spaces and buffer zones don't work against chemical emissions; particulates tend to go wherever the air or water carry them!

Finally council member Whitney quotes the Texas bidders that the oil refinery is a crown jewel. It may be, for the new owner from a monetary standpoint; however, when you drive by the site itself, it is a huge, ugly, deadly blight on our city's landscape:

In conclusion, is it the council's position that the city will settle for short term profits and worry about long term cost, at a later date? Are we repeating past history like the aforementioned contaminated sites? Is this really responsible leadership? We cannot continue to think about city or county revenue stream and the environment separately. We need to develop new ways of living and to encourage them now through education, debate, institutional restructuring and democratic policy.

the public
eased in

What's the Rush?

Edna

In what I believe is the first time I've asked a question about the "rush" about what our community were giving up with regards to our protected revenue stream – approximately three million dollars – supplied by Exxon Corporation in lieu of any sale to a new ownership group.

In Sunday (Jan. 31st) Contra Costa Times Journalist, Johana Barry mentioned, (unbeknownst to me – and, I would presume most residents of Benicia) that Exxon is being sued. The Attorney General of California Bill Lockyer and the District Attorney of Solano County David Paulson cite Exxon for leaking and spilling (from numerous sources; storage tanks, processing units and pipelines) petroleum among other chemicals.

The petroleum spilled have contaminated soil, groundwater and surface water ... including water that is a potential source of drinking water. The petroleum spilled contains, among other chemicals constituents, benzene and toluene. Both listed as known to cause cancer.

According to the suit; filed September 1999, Case #013407 – Exxon has been polluting the ground water since 1988! Exxon in a twenty-seven page rebuttal has denied all charges. Citizens of our town and county can read the summation at the Court House, civil division – second floor, in Fairfield. I made a copy and I am sharing it with neighbors and friends.

This of course poses many questions, but with the case in litigation it is very difficult for interested individuals to secure further documentation. And, of course the silence on this issue from our mayor past and present and city council has been quite telling, indeed.

Recent reports by the Environmental Protection Agency that the San Francisco Bay is polluted; and that Exxon-Benicia has the worst air emissions in the state and a parent organization of doing much environmental harm; wouldn't it be wise for the Federal Trade Commission; the Attorney General office and yes, even our city council to impose a temporary injunction to delay the sale of the refinery. What seems odd, among many other things, is at present we have the state attorney generals office trying to broker and approve the sale at the same time it is in litigation with the company. We need to know the facts and to find out the truth about what is happening at the Exxon plant – what is the rush about this sale? Our community deserves to know what the results of the suit may have on our future environmental well being.

I'll end with a quote from Rachel Carson book *Silent Spring* — *"I am pessimistic about the human race because it is too ingenious for its own good. Our approach to nature is to beat it into submission. We would stand a better chance of survival if we accommodate ourselves to this planet and viewed it appreciatively instead of skeptically and dictatorially. — E. B. White*

Will Gregory

"Company Town Mentality"

FEB. 2000

DEAR Editor:

I have been astounded by the lack of any serious discourse on the sale of the oil refinery and the on going law suit against Exxon Corporation by the California attorney Generals office and the Solano County District attorney. The suit contends that Exxon has allegedly been contaminating the groundwater at the plant and the spill may have possibly entered into our ^{drinking} water supply.

This has been going on since 1988... I repeat since 1988!!

Legal hearings are scheduled for March in Vallejo. If these accusations are true the implications are staggering. This could easily dwarf all other environmental disasters that this city has had to experience.

Where are all the dissenting voices on this issue?

Is there no group or individual(s) who feel as I do about this serious matter - Exxon will be leaving shortly, what have they left behind? Are we going to have another environmental mess to clean-up? If so who pays for this? ^{MORE importantly,} What does this say

pg #2

about 'us' as a community? Why do we keep repeating the same mistakes (Lake Herman; Insteelot; Benicia Arsenal; Rose Drive) over and over, again? So we've been poisoned before; we are being poisoned now (this Exxon plant has the worst-toxic ^{air} emissions in the state) so are we as a community going to continue to allow this to happen?

What does this say about the leadership of this town where revenue stream takes precedence over community values and the health of our citizens?

Who on the present council represents the values of community stewardship over the values of commerce and greed? There are a few questions that must be addressed in the near future.

To increase awareness and overcome apathy I would propose that our only local newspaper the Benicia Herald use its many voices which currently 4 pound on a variety of topics from: Gong Shui; Fishing Reports; Doctor's medical advice; Real Estate news and regular editorial page writers; re-direct their attention (for one column) to the subject of the oil refinery and the precise effect that this

#3.

has on their particular field of expertise.

For Example. Dr. George Delgado, just how detrimental is the poor quality of air caused by the refining process ^{to} the medical well being of Benicia residents? Our fishing expert ^{JAM Sorenson -} ~~David Wilson~~ must know something about how water pollution effects our aquatic life and our present and future fishing prospects? How would Geng Shui columnist Caroline Patrick react about having the "Harmony of order in Benicia," upset by having a massive, ugly, dirty oil refinery in the middle of our town... is this good Geng Shui? How does having the worst air emissions in California effect our real estate values... Rod Herman. I would also be curious to know how David Bestke feels about this issue from his astute intellectual viewpoint? Finally, after all this serious chatter maybe Steve Gibbs could inject some ^{much needed} humor into this issue? We all live in Benicia, we need to start expressing how we feel about this topic - silence means that we agree with the above mentioned status quo.

#4.

A final footnote: I would also like to extend the challenge to our local representatives: Council members; County supervisors; state senator and state assembly women and of course our past and present mayors. Their silence on this issue has been stunning!

The question of course is why? Could it possibly be the "Company town mentality" that has tied everyone's tongue?

Sincerely,

Will Meyer-

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P.S. please find enclosed my first article, "30 years is enough." You told me that this would be printed. I'm still waiting... This is an "alternative viewpoint" from the rhetoric or spin of Mr. Fred Newhouse.

March 2000...

Editor: "Just Look Up!"

Last week as I strolled along
First Street down to the Marina Green and finally to the
fishing pier, I positioned myself against the back-rail of the
dock looking back at the city skyline. As I looked-up
the sight of two refineries caught my attention. Due south
of the Carquinez Strait in Shell-Martinez and to the left
at the south end of the Bonner Bridge was Tosco-Avon both
spilling steam and smoke into the blue sky. As my eyes
moved to the north I could just see an Exxon smokestack
spewing forth large clouds of smoke into the air. When
I turned back towards the Port Costa Hills I witnessed dark
steamy clouds of emissions coming from Tosco-Rodes over
the hills. So in one very special moment, I had observed
all "4" oil refineries polluting our air and community at the

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Same precise time folks, all you have to do is just look up and once you know where to look on the skyline it becomes very disturbing because this happens every day.

On March 3rd, the sale of Exxon-Bonica to Texas based Valero Energy Corporation was finalized, this will of course open up a new chapter for our community. With all the fanfare and the large ad placed in the Bonica Herald telling us about the good works and deeds of this new company. Let us not forget the state of Texas has the worst air pollution standards in United States. According to an article from the Contra Costa Times (3-7) Columnist, Molly Davis, states, "the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation set up by NAFTA, ^{states that,} Texas pollutes more than any other state or Canadian Province. According to the E.P.A, Texas is number #1 in overall toxic releases; recognized carcinogens in the air; developmental toxins in the air,

3.

Cancer risks and 10 other equally depressing categories."

So we as a community must be vigilant about the people and rhetoric coming from the company and our local representatives.

Bonnie's company town mentality is a complete abrogation to all community based democratic structures.

All the chatter is about increased revenue stream (as if this will make it all better.) based on ^{the} higher cost paid by Valero

which will mean more tax revenue for the city. Our officials

always seem to deny that anything is wrong in this town,

at the plant or the surrounding area in which we live. We

are immersed in environmental problems that are never talked

about in their entirety, either locally or regionally. We the

citizens of this town have to plead for some kind of equal

treatment at the hands ~~of~~ our elected council and Mayor

who have shown the people what can only be interpreted as

thinly veiled contempt. From the secret meetings with

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Exxon and the three bidding oil firms to the private talks with the Federal Trade Commission and the office of the Attorney General of California all of this out of the public purview.

I would ask, where is the Democratic process? Where is the public participation? Democracy is based on the principle of one person, one vote. The market functions on the principle of one dollar, one vote. Consequently, under conditions of unequal economic power, a community ruled by the market (revenue stream) is a community ruled by those who have the most money - the very antithesis of democracy.* This whole process from the beginning to the end is a classic example of the complete privatization of our local political process.*

On my return from the waterfront, I pondered the involvement of our elected and appointed officials in the negotiation and sale of Exxon which facilitated not the slightest pause in the pollution of our community.

Will Grayson -